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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 001948

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#) [AE](#)
SUBJECT: UAE THINK TANK DIRECTOR SPEAKS OUT ON IRAN, IRAQ,
AND THE UAE

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Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR MICHELE J. SISON, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: On May 10, al-Ittihad, a semi-official Arabic daily, published an exclusive interview with Jamal Sanad al-Suwaidi, Director General of the Abu Dhabi-based quasi-governmental think tank, Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research (ECSSR). Al-Suwaidi, an honorary Major General in the armed forces is a long-time confidant of Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed (MbZ). Al-Suwaidi spoke broadly on the issues of Iran's nuclear ambitions, the possibility of stability Iraq, and the outlook of democracy in the UAE and the broader Middle East. He warned that Iran's nuclear ambitions may set off a regional arms race, and that the U.S. is exaggerating the threat that Iran poses in an effort to justify a preemptive strike against Iran, drawing a parallel to what took place against Iraq. Al-Suwaidi's comments are not typical of those that we have heard from either MbZ or other UAEG interlocutors. The fact that these statements came from the head of ECSSR, and were published in a newspaper with UAEG ties, appears to indicate that al-Suwaidi's statements may actually represent MbZ's thinking, and that MbZ wants these points made public, but not as part of the official dialogue between the UAEG and USG. End Summary

Iran

¶2. (U) Al-Suwaidi cautioned GCC member states that allowing Iran to develop nuclear weapons may set off an arms race in the region, specifically noting that Turkey, Egypt and Saudi Arabia would all seek nuclear weapons if Iran were successful. He stated that if Iran became a nuclear power, the entire region would be permanently destabilized. However, he added, without a nuclear weapon, Iran poses no real threat to the region as their conventional weapons lack sophistication, noting that a torpedo recently tested was of World War II vintage. When asked if the UAE would join the nuclear race and seek its own nuclear weapons, he said that will depend on Iran's situation in the future.

¶3. (U) Al-Suwaidi acknowledged his belief that the U.S. and EU are intentionally magnifying Iran's potential threat, as they did with Iraq, in order to justify future action. He stated that what is happening now is a deliberate and conscious magnification of Iran's power for the sole purpose of justifying a strike against it and eliminating its military power. He noted that if the U.S. and EU do not strike Iran, then the most likely threat against Iran would come from Israel. When asked if GCC countries would be threatened if there is a war between Iran and the U.S., al-Suwaidi said that the Iranian weapons are likely directed

at known enemies such as Israel, but that if war were to break it would undoubtedly affect Gulf countries due to the large foreign presence in each country.

14. (U) Asked why Iran is knowingly accepting its power to be exaggerated, al-Suwaidi stated that the undeniable fact is that Iranian President Ahmedinejad is launching "incendiary statements" betting that the U.S. will not strike, and counting on the U.S. remaining preoccupied in Iraq. Al-Suwaidi speculated that there would be no war between the U.S. and Iran, but noted that if the situation does worsen, the U.S. will likely launch a quick strike on Iran's main military bases, but then not go beyond that. He added that such a strike would be unlike any seen before, using new missiles and weapons technology that have not been previously deployed. He suspects that the Iranians also suspect this and are afraid of such an attack becoming reality.

Iraq

15. (U) When asked whether the solution to the situation in Iraq was the return of the Baath party and a Saddam-like regime, al-Suwaidi wondered how anyone could even suggest such a thing. He said that what Iraq is currently witnessing is a natural result of the years of Saddam and Baath rule. He stated that Iraq is currently going through a critical phase and called on people to rise above party and sectarian differences which have replaced the voice of reason, victimizing the people of Iraq. He added that the situation in Iraq is unhealthy at all levels and that it will take at least 20 years to stabilize. He stated that now Iraq has rid itself of a dictator, it will never yearn again for such a ruling power.

Democratization

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16. (U) On the issue of opening up the political process in the UAE, al-Suwaidi said that he personally believes that there will be no political parties in the near or foreseeable future in the UAE. He stated that in order for political parties to be established, two important elements need to exist: political will/decision explicitly allowing them, and the existence of an internal environment that would allow different political groupings to draw together and form a party; neither of these elements currently exists.

17. (U) Al-Suwaidi said that the U.S. is not serious about promoting democracy, evidenced by its failure to acknowledge Hamas' success in the recent Palestinian elections. He added that he suspects that the U.S. is not ready to deal with Islamist movements in the Arab world in positions of authority. He stated that one should accept an election's results no matter what they may be. He noted that U.S. rejection of Hamas and acceptance of "forged elections" against the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt indicate that the U.S. is worried about having Islamists in authority.

18. (U) Asked about the political direction Western countries have taken in recent years, al-Suwaidi said that they have become as extremist as al-Qaida. He stated that the evidence is seen in the U.S. closing a number of mosques in American cities, detaining Guantanamo prisoners without trial for four years, and arresting innocent people. He added that, in an effort to protect the American people after 9/11, the security situation did improve, but that it has now turned into an obsession against Arabs and Muslims who are constantly under attack in the media.

Comment:

19. (C) Established in 1994 by MbZ to provide him with

intelligence analysis in his role as Chief of Staff of the UAE Armed Forces, the ECSSR is now nominally independent, but maintains its focus on regional security issues, with MbZ as its president or patron. Al-Suwaidi has been the Director General of ECSSR since its inception. Al-Ittihad is a semi-official Arabic daily that commonly publishes all UAE government (WAM) press releases verbatim. These two facts combined lend credence to al-Suwaidi's published statements as having possibly emanated from elements of the UAEG if not from MbZ himself. End Comment.

Bio Note

¶10. (C) Having earned a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, al-Suwaidi also occasionally teaches at UAE University. He has been very ill for months, with EmbOffs noting that he looks like "a man at death's door", although his cancer may now be in remission. He has authored and edited several books on Iran and Gulf Security. End Note.
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